

VASECTOMY.*

AN ARGUMENT FOR ITS THERAPEUTIC USE
IN CERTAIN MENTAL DISEASES AND AS A
MEANS OF DIMINISHING CRIME AND THE
NUMBER OF CRIMINALS.

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AMONG the many criminologists not a few of the most erudite, humane and progressive have advocated castration as an efficient and justifiable treatment for the insane and those of the criminal class who are given to persistent, violent and homicidal tendencies. The reasons generally adopted in advocacy of this important measure of human progress are:

1. The benefit or improvement in the mental condition of the afflicted individual; and,
2. The protection it affords to his fellows from violence and the jeopardy of life; and,
3. The important protection it affords to mankind against the transmission by heredity of morbid and vicious elements of organization and tendencies which add so much to the world's misery and human disgrace.

My purpose in asking the attention of this Society of medical practitioners is to submit the question of a possibility of adopting the therapeutic procedure of vasectomy for the relief of a class of sufferers (imbeciles, maniacs and criminals), who, by heredity or environment, have acquired morbid sexual perversion of a chronic and dangerous kind. We see a few of them in our private practice and many of them in our eleemosynary and reformatory institutions. Some of the most horrible crimes of history have been committed by sexual perverts, in that state of maniacal eroticism or mental disease which abolishes reason and leaves only a bestial fury of insane impulses, to kill and mutilate their victims.

Many years ago a man came to me in great mental anguish, asking my services as a surgeon to castrate him. After patiently listening to his pitiable history. I sent him off with a diagnosis of insanity and referred him to specialists in that department of medicine. The following year he returned with the same request, yet more urgently expressed and in a more deplorable mental state, full of cogent reasons for the operation being performed. He felt at times, under excitement, violent impulses, which he feared would get beyond his control—an impending mania to kill and destroy, utterly repulsive and frightful to himself as he afterwards remembered them; a dangerous man in the community in which he lived. A year later he returned to me the third time, more determined and more insane and irresponsible than ever. The established teaching and practice of the profession, as well as public sentiment, denied this unfortunate the relief which he sought in castration and

which seemed reasonable enough; but only the asylum was left to him as a refuge.

Since that day we have learned something of vasectomy by many reported experiences, and while it is as efficient as castration in subduing sexual perversion and maniacal tendencies in the erotic subject, it is free from many of the objections which are usually advanced to the excision of the testes. The retention of the glands and some of their physiological functions is advantageous to the general health, personal ambition and social enjoyment. Vasectomy, in short, judging from recent experiences, is shown to be free from the dreaded after effects, mental depression and hypochondria which in the past (perhaps erroneously) were attributed to excision of the testes. The operation is less repulsive to the patient, is absolutely free from danger and leaves no mutilation nor visible scars, and within my observation but little atrophy of the testes.

In conclusion, I beg to report briefly the following case:

A boy at the age of puberty developed signs of mental disturbances, self-prostitution, violent temper, and maniacal tendencies under sexual excitement. Inability to learn in school, rebellious and refractory at home, and after several attempts to violently assault his sisters, he was placed in a reformatory institution, where he was restrained and disciplined for several years without marked change in his condition. About two years ago he submitted to vasectomy as a rational therapeutic measure, with the most satisfactory result. His mother reports to me that his mental faculties show great improvement, with ability for application and continuous concentration; entire relief from maniacal attacks of rage and destructiveness. His general health is good; he is quite industrious, ambitious to work and happy in following his trade, which he is mastering with fair progress.

Comparing his present condition with the pitiable and hopeless state he has been in for years prior to the operation, amply justifies the procedure, and encourages its adoption as a rule of practice in such cases. The patient himself realizes the benefit he has derived and warmly expresses his gratitude.

The practical results of vasectomy in this class of cases, have yet to be shown by a multitude of cases and an accumulation of observations, but enough has been shown to commend it to the attention of the profession, and especially to the medical staffs of public institutions where such unfortunate patients most do congregate.

DISCUSSION.

Dr. J. Rosenstirn, San Francisco—It is hard to judge from the one case reported by Dr. Ellinwood, whether such interference will always have such a most satisfactory result. We accept, perhaps, that there is an internal secretion from the organs of generation that has an irritant influence on the nervous system, and thereby produces these changes in character and mentality, as Dr. Ellinwood has described. I could see my way clear to the efficacy of that interference, but where there are anatomical lesions, anatomical changes in the central nervous system, I do not see exactly how vasectomy can change the character or disposition and the degeneracy of the patient. I believe Dr. Ellinwood

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has to be congratulated upon the result of this singular and single case. Whether it can be recommended and accepted in cases of that kind, the future perhaps will detail. It is a most interesting case, and the result is excellent.

Dr. J. H. McBride, Pasadena—I think Dr. Ellinwood's position is one which ought to be considered entirely free from prejudice. Although I have found in talking with others that it is very difficult to consider. There are some facts that guide us somewhat in the value of this operation. Some years ago a man in Chicago was arrested for assaulting women on the street. This man recognized the fact that his passions were beyond his control and asked the physician to perform an operation. It did not affect him at all. He was the same after it as before. The operation destroyed the power of apperception, and after he had recovered from the effects of the operation and recognized this fact, he threatened to shoot the surgeon. I believe it is a fact, however, that the operation of ovariectomy has shown that the sexual desire is not destroyed in a large number of cases. It is well for us to consider that in this operation the power of apperception is destroyed, but it does not necessarily follow that the patient's passions are destroyed. If we do succeed in one point, we fail in the other.

Dr. R. L. Doig, San Diego—I had a case of this kind. A boy with the same disposition that these patients generally have, although as far as I know he had never attempted assault. The first I knew of him he was found after having castrated himself. He told me that he did it because he had been in the habit of self-abuse, and also that he was afraid of doing some damage. The boy was not particularly bright, but a thorough scholar and rather retiring in his habits. I saw the boy some eight years afterward and the depressing effect had not taken place. He was much better disposition and promised to be, while still retiring, more jovial and a better boy.

Dr. W. T. Lucas, Santa Maria—A few years ago a young man came to me requesting me to castrate him. He was a total stranger to me. I talked with him and he said he had been to see other doctors and they advised him to be castrated, which was false. He suffered from spinal irritation. Of course he was a masturbator and had been reading advertisements until they had worked on his mind. He suffered from the spinal condition also. I put him on a treatment and tried to get a moral influence over him, but could not eradicate that idea from his mind that the only cure or salvation was castration. He went to another physician and told him that I had said he ought to be castrated and the doctor castrated him. I was called afterward on account of hemorrhage and he made a nice recovery from the castration with the relief of the spinal condition to a certain extent, and I think became of a great deal better disposition. I had a very serious time with him afterwards. He had not received the relief he wanted and threatened to kill the doctor, and I think he would have if the doctor had not left the town.

Dr. O. P. Paulding, Santa Maria—These are very interesting cases. I saw this case just reported myself. He came to me and I told him it would be necessary to operate on him, to do as he wanted. I afterwards heard that he had got this other doctor. He did have a most violent temperament afterwards and desired to kill the doctor and even to kill himself. Another man told me that he had bought strichnine and intended to kill himself. He had an uncle who took him east, and he came back a changed boy and is now the brightest young man in the village.

MEDICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS.

Alameda County.

The Alameda County Medical Association held its regular meeting Tuesday evening, January 12th, Dr. O. D. Hamlin in the chair. Forty members were present. Dr. Beckwith read a paper entitled "The Pathology and Treatment of Lobar Pneumonia."

The doctor reviewed the pathology of pneumonia, taking up the various stages of the disease in detail and stating that autopsies show that the majority of fatal cases die during the transition stage between red and gray hepatization. He called attention to the appalling death rate of pneumonia at the present time, quoting statistics showing that it caused about 10 per cent. of all deaths. Under prognosis he emphasized the importance of the difference in virulence of the pneumococcus and thought that toxemia was the most common cause of death. Prophylaxis is not considered enough by the medical profession in general, and proper isolation of the patient and care of the sputum not carried out. He cited a case in which a young lady had contracted pneumonia by kissing her dying mother. The various methods of treatment were taken up, the doctor saying that, after all, while we may hold to one or another specific in which we may have confidence, yet the treatment of the symptoms as they arise forms the most important part in the successful handling of the disease. He thought that the best treatment today was with suprarenal extract. For the past two years he had used this drug with marked success. It should be given from the outset in doses of from one to six grains every two hours. The best results were obtained in children and those past middle age. The course of the disease under the exhibition of the drug has almost always been shortened, the crisis usually occurring about the end of the third day. In some cases, however, especially in adults, the drug had no influence. In conjunction with the administration of the extract, the usual treatment for the disease was carried out, including sponging, strychnia, digitalis and whisky as indicated. Epinephrin hydrate seemed to be negative in its effect, and a change to the suprarenal extract has rendered positive results. The mode of action of the drug is rather problematical. It seems, however, to increase the number of leukocytes in the blood and to have the power of destroying toxic substances, either directly or by stimulating the system to manufacture antitoxin.

DISCUSSION.

Dr. Buteau thought that the indication in treating pneumonia was to use any measures, either in the shape of food or medication, which would tend to increase the number of leukocytes in the blood, as they seemed to play such an important part in the battle between the system and the pneumococcic poison.

Dr. Krone emphasized the importance of training the patient to exert a mental effort towards regulating the character of his own respirations, claiming that in this way it was possible to decrease the rate of respirations.

Dr. Crosby—I find that in the cases that I have treated with suprarenal extract that if I did not get a favorable action in three days I did not get it at all. In full doses the drug sometimes causes a rapid and irregular heart action and has to be stopped.

Dr. McCleave spoke of the use of ice to relieve pain and nervousness and to reduce fever. He thought that he obtained favorable action from the use of creosote carbonate given for its antitoxic effect.

Dr. Stratton—I think it possible to abort pneumonia in some instances, the necessities being a sthenic